



Solidarity Economy News

Building Human Solidarity to Sustain Life

Newsletter No. 7 2014

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Political Perspectives

Political Perspectives is a new section that has been added to the newsletter. It is aimed at being a space for the political perspectives of the emerging SEM to be proposed, debated and developed. Building our political consciousness and perspectives is crucial in developing a serious politics that knows what it wants and what it stands for, and is able to communicate and enact its message in society. We call on all members of the SEM to write articles and contribute to debates in the Political Perspectives section. This first article in the section deals with the NUMSA moment in South Africa and its implications for the SEM.

Discussion Document

Towards a Solidarity Economy Movement (SEM) Political Perspective: Significance of the NUMSA Moment and Implications for the SEM

The National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (NUMSA) is currently the largest trade union in South Africa and Africa, with over 300 000 members. After months of worker controlled deliberation and debate, NUMSA made historic decisions at a conference in December 2013. This 'workers parliament' resolved as follows:

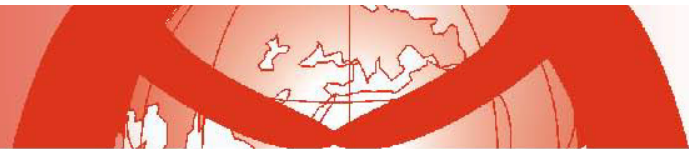
- NUMSA withdraws from the ANC-led tripartite Alliance, after committing to it for almost 20 years. In addition, NUMSA calls upon all COSATU affiliates to also do the same.
- NUMSA withdraws all electoral support for the ANC but calls on its members to vote as they see fit.
- NUMSA resolves to build a United Front and work towards establishing a movement for socialism or workers party.
- NUMSA commits to being responsive to its members and organising along value chains rather than in an industry.
- Finally NUMSA has committed to advance a series of socio-economic strikes to challenge

the neoliberal policies of the ANC government, starting with a strike on February 26th to challenge the Youth Wage Subsidy and present alternatives for youth employment.

What informs NUMSA?

The decisions made by NUMSA are informed by various factors:

- The failure of the ANC government to address the triple challenge of unemployment, poverty and inequality. For example South Africa has one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the world at well over 60%. Also workers wages which supports on average four other persons in a household has shown a trend of stagnation mainly for those in lower income brackets like farm workers, petrol attendants, domestic workers etc. This is made worse with high unemployment and labour market flexibility (part time, temporary work etc) which allows capital to keep wages low;
- The ongoing commitment of the ANC government to neoliberal policies that favour business and beneficiaries of black economic empowerment. The ANC government's National Development Plan relies on solutions that have made South Africa an unviable society. It is not the best way forward for South Africa. Instead, NUMSA is committed to the Freedom Charter as a starting point for thinking about the way forward;
- The Marikana massacre of mine workers on August 16, 2012 has raised serious concerns in NUMSA about the class bias and increasing authoritarianism in the ANC government;
- Finally, NUMSA is deeply concerned about an ANC aligned faction in COSATU that is dividing and undermining the independence of COSATU. This is a consistent politics that aims totame COSATU so as to make it a mouthpiece for the ruling party while at the same time promoting a divide between social movements, communities and the unemployed, on one side,



and organised workers on the other. NUMSA is concerned about this.

Political Significance of the NUMSA Moment

So what does the decisions made by NUMSA mean for the working class, the left and progressives in South Africa? What is the significance of the NUMSA moment? There is a fourfold historical significance to the NUMSA moment:

(1) First NUMSA has turned its back on black middle class and nationalist leadership, that has led liberation politics for about a century. NUMSA is affirming the need for workers to organise themselves and decide where they would like to take the country. They want worker leadership to come to the fore to address South Africa's challenges;

(2) Second, NUMSA has rejected the role of the South African Communist Party and its politics of vanguard control of workers. NUMSA is saying it will not be led by or accept the politically bankrupt leadership of the SACP, which proclaims it represents workers interests but actually does not;

(3) Third, NUMSA is going beyond the elite politics of bargaining with business and government. It wants to build mass popular power in the streets to challenge governments pro-capital policies and advance alternatives. In this process it wants to build a United Front.

(4) Fourth, NUMSA leaving the ANC-Alliance means it is deepening the rupture in the political base of the ANC but aligning forces to the left. South Africa has not been able to bring to the fore a serious left project. Its left has been divided, weak and dogmatic. Social movements and grass roots protest actions have been narrow and incapable of rallying a broad left movement. The DLF played an important role in rallying left solidarity but this has been limited and without a serious mass working class base. A serious and conscious working class base is a necessary requirement to shift politics to the left in South Africa and beyond merely deracialising capitalism.

Implications for the Solidarity Economy Movement (SEM)

For the SEM, the NUMSA moment means several things. First, building active unity between workplace and community struggles. Imagine the most powerful

union in South Africa standing with movements to advance grievances and alternatives, while the unemployed, social movements and communities march with workers. This is serious collective power and holds out the potential to shift the balance of power in society. The United Front that NUMSA wants to build with us is absolutely important. Second, it means the SEM has to also place its campaigns, perspectives and initiatives on the agenda with NUMSA as we build the United Front. On February 26th and beyond when NUMSA takes to the streets we need to support NUMSA in a disciplined way but also use the space created by NUMSA to present our alternatives (the solidarity economy, the SE Fund, food sovereignty, create work through worker cooperatives, cooperative banks, participatory budgeting and even our debates about a Democratic Eco-Socialist Vision and Principles for South Africa) to resolve the crises facing South African society. Third, it means we must also continue to strengthen, build and consolidate the SEM as an independent movement. The NUMSA moment will not gain momentum unless we strengthen ourselves. A strong United Front means strong movements and a strong political base. Finally, the call by NUMSA to form a United Front also means the SEM has to concentrate its limited resources and capacities. While the SEM will support initiatives that strengthen democracy and will secure allies to achieve its objectives, we cannot have 'two fronts'. Maybe the DLF which is a loose convergence of movements, left groups and individuals needs to disband? (It is not a formal organisation thus making this very easy.) Maybe the DLF has played its historical role but now has to make way for the NUMSA-led Left convergence and United Front? We cannot afford to confuse grass-roots and left forces any more. Politically and in practice the SEM needs to prioritise the NUMSA-led convergence and front building process. The SEM will engage NUMSA on its own and not through any other platform.

**Forward to the NUMSA Moment!
Forward to a Working Class-led United Front!
Link Workplace and Community Struggles!
Build, Strengthen and Consolidate an Independent SEM NOW!**

National News

International Cooperative Association (ICA) World Congress Takes Place in Cape Town

The world association for the international cooperative movement, ICA, held its world congress in Cape Town in November 2013. A major theme of the conference was focusing on the growth of cooperatives to become the dominant model of enterprise and of meeting societies' needs. The Chairperson of COPAC, Dr Vishwas Satgar, was asked to write a think piece for the discussion document for the congress, reproduced below. Perspectives from South Africa are helping to shape the direction of the international cooperative movement!



A Cooperative Movement
Response to the Crisis of Civilisation:
Choosing to Sustain Life!
Dr. Vishwas Satgar

The Crisis of Capitalist Civilisation and the Growth Machine

For the past 500 years the world has been remade into a planetary capitalist system. This has been a violent process involving colonialism, genocide, slavery, debt-based control of developing countries and domination of the world by powerful countries. However, over the past three decades and with the demise of the Soviet-controlled Second World, the global economy has been restructured to ensure the vision, values (individualism, markets and greed) and policies (liberalisation, privatisation and financialisation) to bring to the fore a truly planetary capitalist civilisation. This process of restructuring has been referred to as neoliberalisation, which places global finance at the centre of the global economy. Put differently, global finance is now central to the systemic logic of the global economy. This means whole societies, economic sectors and even states, have been remade to manage the risk to finance and the finance-controlled firm.

Introduction

The development of the ICA 2020 Blueprint for a Cooperative Decade comes to the fore at a crucial historical moment. There is a great deal of uncertainty and flux in the world; dogmatic ideas that have held sway for the past three decades are unhinging, complex global challenges loom large and the global political economy is in transition. The Blueprint frames a much-needed integrated strategic vision, which serves as a compass to navigate the difficult world we live in and guide the ship of ethical values and principles defining cooperative identity today. However, even with the guiding role of the Blueprint the journey for cooperatives, over the next few years, requires an awareness of the challenges and practical strategic choices to ensure cooperatives become:

- The acknowledged leader in economic, social and environmental sustainability
- The model preferred by people
- The fastest growing form of enterprise

The crucial challenge is to recognise the cooperative option and its growth is not another version of what exists or something slightly better, but rather it is an alternative. Such a perspective is developed in this contribution from the standpoint of critical and green global political economy.

This experiment in remaking global capitalism has produced a crisis-ridden form of neoliberal capitalism and capitalist civilisation. As high finance prevailed over global accumulation and imposed its speculative rationality, the global capitalist economy has blown out, crashing economies: from the Mexican peso crisis (1994), Asian crisis (1997), Brazil and Russia (1998), Dot com (2000), Argentina (2001), to the 2007-present global crisis. Financialised over-accumulation marks the crisis tendencies of neoliberal capitalism. However, the present crisis, with its origins in the US housing market crisis beginning in 2007, cannot be merely understood as a crisis of financial accumulation or the 'Great Financial Crisis'. Such an understanding perpetuates the idea that by simply fixing financial markets the crisis can be

overcome. This reduces the crises of capitalism to a singular crisis and fuels a simplistic understanding of capitalism: that is, capitalism has all the answers or it always overcomes crises. Such a perspective fails to appreciate the extent to which neoliberal financialisation is not just about speculation in financial markets, but is a systemic logic driving global accumulation. It is a crisis of financial markets (booms and busts), of sectors in the global economy (from housing to manufacturing), of those cities and countries integrated into this logic, of a project of transnational finance and most importantly a systemic crisis. The latter dimension of the crisis is most serious. The logic of financialisation undermines the conditions necessary to reproduce life on planet earth (human and non-human). This includes the inter-locking of financialised chaos with resource peak (not just oil), climate change, food crises (such as skyrocketing food prices in 2007-2008) and the securitisation of politics (such that authoritarian and undemocratic state practices are increasingly apparent). High finance does not have solutions to these challenges, except more financialisation (that is, more of the same).

The consequences of the crisis of capitalist civilisation today are dire. While it has created a plutocratic elite (the super rich 1%), it has brought forth a new form of barbarism, leading to our self-annihilation. As a species we are destroying ourselves, other life forms and the conditions that sustain planetary life. This has amounted to the following:

- A tendency towards genocide – as expressed through the structural violence unleashed by an economy that privileges profits for finance controlled firms over lives. Crucial examples are the suicides of over 200 000 Indian farmers in the context of liberalisation, 10 million people who die globally from hunger every year, and many others from lack of access to medication for treatable diseases like HIV/AIDS, malaria, diarrhoea and tuberculosis. The end of wage earning, through increasing and in some cases permanent unemployment, also imperils human reproduction. Moreover, we condemn future generations to endure structural violence as we undermine other life giving conditions on the planet.

- Overshooting planetary limits – this includes increasing ocean acidification (which is linked to climate change and confirmed by the recently released Fifth assessment report of the International Panel on Climate Change). The proposed boundary is 2.75, but the current level is 2.90. Species loss is proposed at 10 per million but the current rate is greater than 100 per million. (The International Union for Conservation of Nature suggests rather conservatively that over 17000 plants and animals are at risk of extinction.) The proposed boundary limit for excess nitrogen to avoid ecological degradation is 35 million tons; the current output is 121 million tons.

- Destruction of life giving conditions – By 2025 two thirds of the world's population is likely to face water scarcity. With current climate change trends, including breaking the threshold of 400 parts per million of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere we are moving rapidly to a 2 degree or more temperature increase on the planet. We are heading for climate breakdown according to the Fifth IPCC assessment report. Various tipping point indicators indicate this, including: the melting of the Arctic ice sheet which is releasing immense amounts of methane gas (the deadliest greenhouse gas), increasing sea levels (currently at 3mm per year or an inch per decade), a rapid decrease in mountain glaciers, warming of the oceans (where it estimated that about 90 per cent of heat accumulated on the planet is located), devastating droughts, extreme summer and winter temperatures and negative effects on crop yields as average planetary temperatures rise, and rapid destruction of rain forests which is destroying the 'green lungs' of the planet.

Africa is hardest hit and is the epicentre of the crisis of capitalist civilisation. It is where HIV/AIDS is ravaging communities, where climate change impacts are expected to be the worst (some analysts suggest Africa will experience the hottest temperatures and currently Namibia is experiencing the worst drought in its history with over 800 000 people requiring food aid) and where the scramble for minerals, fossil fuels and farming land is all part of a new wave of destructive extractivism and dispossession. For advocates of economic growth this means Africa is experiencing an economic boom, with mainly African

petro-states averaging about 5% growth rates.

Central to capitalist civilisation is the role of growth measured in GDP (Gross Domestic Product). GDP measures the value of income (goods and services) less the cost of producing this output (e.g. the raw materials, labour). It is the most powerful measurement tool and number in the world that determines economic policy-making. However, this 'Frankenstein' number, as it has been referred to, was initially invented in the inter-war years to assist the US government understand the impact of economic policies. It was also used in war planning, and after World War II became the most powerful economic policy tool in the capitalist world. In the US context, it also counts military expenditure as part of measuring growth. The growth machine is constantly cranked up and encouraged by policy-makers, politicians and business to keep the juggernaut of production, consumption and investment going. It is a proxy for more wealth creation for an elite. In the midst of the current crisis more growth has been set as a primary policy objective. However, from the standpoint of the crisis of civilisation this means deepening crisis and greater barbarism. More growth means genocide, breaching planetary limits and destroying conditions that sustain life. In short, economic growth does not take into account the real cost to human life and the planet.

The International Cooperative Movement at a Cross-Roads

The global crisis has, in a sense, enhanced the appeal of cooperatives. The cooperative advantage has been accentuated in global common sense. This is also expressed through the Blueprint for a Cooperative Decade which recognises the opportunity to make the cooperative case. However, it is important to recognise that the cooperative movement also faces difficult challenges in the context of a world controlled by high finance. It has been contested by high finance and at times brought into discourses that render cooperatives merely another business form, emptied of their deeper social character. In many parts of the world the global capitalist civilisation has reduced cooperatives to small and medium enterprises, 'social enterprises', another way of making money and as entities functional to the making of 'competition states' that withdraw from directing economic development. This has negative consequences on the

space for developing genuine cooperatives, as well as cooperative autonomy and identity.

At the same time, the dramatic economic power of cooperatives in some parts of the world and in some sectors of national economies has also challenged cooperative identity. Many cooperatives have to make difficult decisions to adjust to market pressures, competition and economic restructuring as part of globalisation. This has prompted mergers, complex inter-locks, financial stake holding and generally a consolidation of market power. In this context, while experimenting with new practices where necessary, the sustainability of internally democratic and member-driven practices have also been lost as cooperatives become globalising 'giants'. In developing countries, the end of state control has posed a challenge of building a tradition and practice of member-driven cooperatives, which brings forth new challenges for responsive cooperative education from below.

Another crucial challenge, facing the cooperative movement today has got to do with a narrow understanding of the cooperative form, that is, it is both a social institution and a business. Merely reducing cooperatives to these two dimensions misses the deeper movement character of cooperatives. It fails to recognise that genuine cooperatives are about linking, solidarity and working together. Since the formation of the ICA there has been a strong emphasis on vertically based national movements. Going forward over the next decade requires the ICA to also recognise that cooperative movements have different shapes and forms, in national contexts. In particular, the rise of new social movements over the past three decades—unemployed people's movement, landless people's movements, the Occupy movement, climate justice networks, for example – which also promote cooperative development, prompts the ICA to recognise that the agency for cooperative development in the world has emerged from different social forces. Such movements are potentially crucial allies of the international cooperative movement. A genuine effort has to be made by the ICA to reach out to these movements.

Finally, and flowing from the previous point, is a recognition that even in its origins in the 19th century cooperative philosophy has been divided between

two ideological currents: ameliorative and transformative. Over the past few decades, both these currents of cooperation have come to the fore in a context in which the radical utopian imagination renews itself. In the World Social Forum there has been a consistent affirmation of the notion 'Another World Is Possible'. This rallying slogan with its powerful anticipatory message nourishes a powerful commitment to the transformative impulse of cooperation expressed through the idea of the 'solidarity economy'. Currently, in the ICA, the space for the transformative impulse to drive cooperative development is uncertain. Ideally, the ICA needs to ensure both ameliorative and transformative impulses of cooperative development feed-off, support and democratically challenge each other in order to advance cooperative growth over the next few years. A genuine unity, based on diversity, of the cooperative movement in the 21st century is what is required to confront the crisis of capitalist civilisation.

Growing the Cooperative Movement As An Alternative - Possible Ways Forward To Realise the 2020 Blueprint for a Cooperative Decade

The propositions that follow are meant to inform the on-going debate on realising the Blueprint for Action, while affirming the cooperative movement and option as an alternative. This means situating the envisaged growth of the cooperative movement in a different paradigm. Some elements of this paradigm are contained in the Blueprint and some are not.

(i) Advancing Cooperatives to Sustain Life

The irrationality of economic growth cannot drive cooperative growth. As an economic measurement and policy tool it is blind to the real consequences of capitalist civilisation on human life and the planet. Moral and ethical considerations do not feature in the growth machine. It is in this context that the prioritisation of sustainability in the Blueprint is welcomed. The role of economic, social and environmental factors in mediating the growth of cooperatives potentially places the cooperative movement in the lead in terms of challenging the world to think differently about how we produce, consume, use finance and live. It potentially holds the prospect of shifting thinking in the world away from merely thinking in terms of 'economic wealth' but engenders a conversation

about a different conception of 'wealth'. That is, the real wealth we have are renewable resources on the planet, life giving conditions and human beings as a creative force. In other words, 'sustainability' as a driver of cooperative growth could open a way to shift focus to protecting the natural and creative human commons; that is, place cooperatives at the centre of sustaining life. It also enables the cooperative movement to join a conversation taking place in the world about a deep and just transition to a low or zero carbon economy prioritising renewable energy, the role of carbon debt, the rights of nature (or living well discourse), climate jobs and ecological restructuring of societies. These are issues being debated by transnational climate justice movements and networks to find genuine solutions to climate change. The ICA and its member organisations need to also actively engage the international climate justice movement in a conversation about these issues to clarify the place and role of sustainable cooperative development in the just transition.

(ii) Cooperative Identity and Power

Generally cooperative identity is defined by its ethical values and principles. When these values and principles are institutionalised this makes for a powerful expression of symbolic power; there is a recognisable difference in the internal relations and practices of a cooperative as compared to other institutions. However, for cooperative growth to accelerate, the global cooperative movement has to become self aware of the other facets of power inherent in the model and which accentuate its identity. Thus beyond symbolic power, cooperatives also have three other types of power: structural power such that they control parts of a market or an economy; movement power based on the networked links, member densities and collective capacities inside the movement; and direct power which refers to the capacity of the movement to shape public opinion through advocacy, mass campaigning and marketing. Together these four forms of power (structural, movement, direct and symbolic) are a crucial strategic thrust through which to advance the growth of cooperatives over the next few years. This also means the cooperative movement has to become much more self aware of its capacity to advance a transformative politics from below in society and in the world. It is only through such a conscious politics that the cooperative movement

can confront the crisis of civilisation and sustain life.

(iii) Affirming Cooperative Democracy as Transformative Democracy

While the Blueprint prioritises an emphasis on participation to drive the growth of cooperatives and strengthen cooperative identity, this particular imperative has to be contextualised to appreciate its wider importance. Essentially, the crisis of civilisation is not just underpinned by the narrowing of democracy and a democratic deficit but there is a conscious attempt to subordinate democracy to markets. In other words, 'market democracy' has become the master narrative of what is democracy. This means the state must prioritise the interests of markets and corporations over citizens' needs, democratic accountability is narrowed and electoral contestation is certainly not a guarantee of social justice, policy change and transformation. Thus market democracy hollows out democracy and concentrates power amongst a few, or the 1% in society. In this context, the importance of economic democracy in a cooperative cannot be underestimated. In fact, the democratic skills, capacities, practice and impulse of cooperatives becomes increasingly important to renew democracy from below to ensure it is deepened. The cooperative form, conscious of its different facets of power, can be the harbinger of direct, participatory and a new kind of accountable electoral democracy; a transformative democracy. This is a crucial antidote to a form of democracy – market democracy – that is in its essence anti-democratic.

(iv) Ending Hunger For 1 Billion – Advancing Global Food Sovereignty

The genocidal consequences of the crisis of capitalist civilisation is reflected in the most tragic number at the heart of this: one billion hungry people. And as some commentators have pointed out there are also

an additional two billion who are food insecure. The global political economy of transnational corporate controlled food is a crime against humanity. Moreover, in the context of climate change and breakdown, the hunger question will become increasingly important and has to be addressed now to ensure we sustain life. This means going beyond 'food security' (merely ensuring enough food is produced to feed a society) and the criminality of large food corporations, and ensuring the food system is reclaimed by the hungry. Thus the crucial challenge facing the cooperative movement is ensuring the right to food of the one billion, and food insecure more generally, is affirmed through securing food sovereignty. The idea of food sovereignty is championed by important and networked peasant and small-scale farmer movements across the world, to ensure food production, distribution and consumption is placed back in the hands of citizens and communities. This has also been endorsed by UNCTAD in its 2013 report entitled: Wake Up Before Its Late. These small scale farmer movements are currently fighting one of the most important battles on the planet to prevent the destruction of small-scale farming by transnational corporations. This is better known as the 'last great dispossession' and is mainly taking place in the global south. At the same time, many cooperatives are also responsible for food production in the world and also control distribution chains. It is time the international cooperative movement opens up a dialogue between these cooperatives and the movement of small-scale farmers to strengthen a global alliance for food sovereignty. It is time to ensure by 2020 that there is zero hunger on the planet, there is a reduction in carbon emissions from agriculture, farming is grounded in agro-ecological methods and is controlled by communities, cities, towns and villages to ensure adaptation to climate change. This can only happen through championing and realising food sovereignty in the world now

SEM Attends the NUMSA Resistance Expo in Johannesburg

Moloko Mokame, Leonard Pheko, Andrew Bennie and Athish Kirun

We are in a key political moment in post-apartheid South Africa, when politics in general, and in particular left politics, are going through a key re-alignment. This comes out of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa's (NUMSA) public denunciation of the ANC's neoliberal, pro-business and anti-poor direction. It has realised that the time has come to build a political and economic alternative outside and to the left of the ruling alliance. To do this it has declared that it will build a United Front with civil society organisations, social movements, community based movements and others. As such NUMSA recognises the need to connect the struggles of workers with community struggles and social movements to build a strong force of workers, the unemployed and the poor that is able to challenge the power of capital and a corrupt state, and propose real alternatives.

Hence at the NUMSA political school that was held in Kempton Park at the end of January, NUMSA also hosted what it called a 'Resistance Expo', a space for civil society organisations and social movements to present their struggles and work and to engage with NUMSA workers on these issues. One of the 'sectors' that was invited was the solidarity economy. COPAC and 2 members from the solidarity economy movement (SEM) were present in the group to engage with NUMSA workers about the solidarity economy alternative. Also present in the solidarity economy group was the organisation Streetnet, South African Informal Traders Alliance (SAITA) South African Self-Employed Women's Association (SASEWA).

These groups had different perspectives, but in 2 hours of discussion with a group of NUMSA workers, the SEM was well represented and able to present to the NUMSA workers the radical grassroots impulse of the solidarity economy. We also related to them what is currently taking place with the emerging SEM and the structures that are in the process of being built as planned at the national conference in August 2013. We also spoke to them about how they can support the SEM, and we told them about our solidarity economy forums and to please attend them to learn more and build stronger relationships with the communities in which they live and work. It was clear that NUMSA is at a turning point, as we witnessed

with workers seriously talking about and showing an interest in the solidarity economy.

This work was extremely well received by NUMSA, which indicated clear intention to deepen the relationship with the SEM and COPAC, and in fact to seriously look into developing capacity in NUMSA to develop and support worker cooperatives and the solidarity economy.

NUMSA, as a progressive and evolving union on the left, can have a potentially crucial role to play in supporting the SEM. We who attended the Resistance Expo therefore strongly feel that the SEM should deepen engagement with NUMSA on advancing the solidarity economy as a broad transformative alternative, of building democratic eco-socialism from below, in the face of deepening inequality, poverty and social discontent we are experiencing in South Africa. Furthermore, we witnessed the fact that NUMSA is clearly a highly democratic and worker-controlled union. This has positive implications for the prospects of NUMSA taking alternatives such as the solidarity economy seriously and intensifies the need to sincerely relate to NUMSA workers about the solidarity economy, because the voices of workers drive the action that NUMSA takes. It is important therefore that we also invite NUMSA workers to visit us in our places where we are building the solidarity economy and working in our cooperatives, to experience what we do, our challenges and our objectives.



So how then should the SEM relate to the NUMSA process in practice in ways that build solidarity and help to advance campaigns from below that unite the interests of workers, farmers, solidarity economy enterprises, the unemployed and the poor? To add further, rather than only thinking about what NUMSA can do to support the SEM, we can link this with thinking about what the SEM also has to offer NUMSA as it embarks on this path of building the power of workers and society to fight for a better South Africa.

At the resistance expo we emphasised to the workers that we aim to build an independent movement that can stand on its own feet, but that still builds alliances with important progressive forces such as NUMSA. The workers appreciated this stance. Thus an important campaign to both advance the solidarity economy and to build NUMSA's support for is the Worker Cooperative Alternative Campaign. The socio-economic strike that NUMSA is organising for 26th February is specifically aimed at the Youth Wage Subsidy, which has been given the go-ahead with the passing of the Employment Tax Incentive Act. This act essentially proposes subsidising capital and employers to employ young job seekers, and fails to deal with the underlying causes of unemployment, and instead simply hands over state money to employers. A key objective of the Worker Cooperative Alternative Campaign is to pressure the state to pass an Act specifically designed to support the development of worker cooperatives in South Africa, a key institution in the solidarity economy. This proposes a very different form of work creation, where workers collectively employ themselves, democratically manage their own work and, guided by its values and principles, aim to pursue objectives of work creation and social benefit that serve the needs of society. This is very different to giving money to employers to employ young people temporarily. As such, it could fit well with proposing an alternative to the youth wage subsidy and would greatly benefit from NUMSA's support.

A further important possible point of deepening the relationship with NUMSA could be in inviting them into our struggles. For example, if we are fighting for land to plant food to feed our communities and build food sovereignty, we could ask for NUMSA workers to support the Food Sovereignty Campaign and join us as we march to or picket at municipal offices. We could also discuss ways in which NUMSA can support cooperatives through, for example, linking their workers to buy their food from local farming cooperatives, or buying t-shirts and bags for the congresses and meetings from sewing cooperatives in the SEM.

We should also involve NUMSA in our SEM activist schools and education processes in order to deepen their appreciation for and understanding of the solidarity economy, food sovereignty, our struggles, our campaigns and our strategies for building.

We feel therefore that it is crucial for the SEM to participate strongly in the NUMSA socioeconomic strike that is taking place across the country on 26 February, as a first step in building solidarity as a basis for a positive relationship in the brave new path that NUMSA is embarking on and which we feel the SEM should support. We encourage all the sites in which SEM building is taking place to organise and mobilise to support the strike on 26 February and build solidarity with progressive forces in this NUMSA-led process.

***Forward to an Independent SEM!
Build NUMSA and Community
Solidarity Now!
Forward to a Working Class Led
United Front!***

Awethu! Campaign Launched

In November 2013 the Awethu! Campaign was launched with the participation of a wide range of social movements, community based organisations, civil society organisations and progressive NGOs. The campaign is focused on the 2014 election process and is aimed at highlighting the corruption of our political system and the limiting of democracy that we have been experiencing under the current regime. The following is the Awethu! call document which explains the campaign and what is plans to do leading up to the 2014 elections.

Awethu! A People's Platform for Social Justice

In the twenty years since South Africa's first democratic elections, the gains that have been made in law and in policy have not significantly impacted on the experience of inequality in our society. Our celebrated Constitution mandates government to transform South Africa into a country of equality, dignity and justice. Yet many of us are hungry, unhoused, have little access to basic services and suffer high levels of violence. Our celebrated Constitution calls on us to participate actively in our government. But we are increasingly alienated from government, shut out of decision-making and punished for protest and dissent. We cannot claim with any confidence that we are a democracy when inequalities of class, race, sex/gender and other discriminations persist to the degree they do. We cannot claim to be a democracy when collective democratic contestation is met with suspicion, police fire and repression.

We are at a critical point in our history. Either democracy must be deepened and greatly extended, or it will be lost to us. We have in our hands our constitution, which provides important instruments we can use to strengthen our struggles for social change. All progressive people and organisations in South Africa need to unite in a clear campaign to retrieve the project of democracy for all who live here. It is time to reassert and reclaim people's power over government. It is time to rally a strong political voice, based in communities, workplaces and schools, for social justice, equality, environmental transformation, solidarity, deepening democracy and dignity for all.

Awethu! It is Ours!

Inequality is widening when it should be narrowing.

Women, girls and sexual minorities live in fear of a constant threat of violence.

Poor communities bear the brunt of environmental damage caused by old and new industries.

Mining is increasing land dispossession and destruction of the environment

Large amounts of state funds are legally spent on luxuries for the politically powerful, while many struggle to put food on the table.

Too often, our police force and public service have acted without integrity or justice.

Public health services and schools are failing.

Rural people are marginalised from constitutional rights.

Unemployment is rising.

Corruption is everywhere.

There is no social justice in South Africa.

There are undemocratic tendencies in our government and the private sector. Important decisions are taken behind closed doors in the interests of few and at great expense to the majority. When people protest about inequality, poverty, pollution, land dispossession and lack of access to basic rights, many senior political leaders do not take their messages seriously, label them and attempt to silence them. Increasingly, the very protests that are a sign of the democratic spirit are met with terrible state violence. In the face of what we describe, the elected representatives of the people in parliament spend more time defending the decisions of their party bosses than promoting the rights of the people.

Business seems happy with a government that cracks down on workers and communities claiming their rights to protest. Business also wants more of our national wealth for itself. It wants policies that protects the wealthy, destroys the environment and limits our democratic rights.

If we continue on this path the poor will remain poor for a long time to come. Many more will become poorer. Inequality will grow. The effects of poverty and inequality on other forms of violence will increase.. This is not what people fought for, were imprisoned for and died for. This need not be. We are a country rich in resources, leadership and ideas.

We call for a broad, independent civic initiative that puts the political system on trial for failing to improve the lives of millions, that demands a more people-centred, participatory democratic project that holds government accountable to a political process that belongs to, and should serve, all of us equally.

Awethu! It is Ours!

We are organisations and individuals who stand for social justice, equality, environmental transformation, solidarity, deepening democracy and dignity of all who live in our country. We value the democratic principles of accountability, collective deliberation, and inclusive decision-making. We aspire to a collectively owned, bottom-up process led by collective conversation about a way forward to a more radically democratic South Africa. All who are compelled by these principles are welcome to join in this platform to transform our democracy.

The Awethu! platform will not become another bureaucratic structure, but will campaign together as a non-aligned people's project. We will stimulate, support and build a movement that consolidates existing democratic conversations and actions across the country into a unified platform, where ideas and solidarities can spread and unseat conservative and anti-democratic political processes.

We call on like-minded organisations and individuals to join our efforts and advance their democratic alternatives on our collective platform. We must, together, generate answers and solutions to address the challenges for the next 20 years of democracy.

To this end, we propose a first campaign around the 2014 national elections:

- Demand full disclosure by all political parties contesting the 2014 election of their funding sources;
- Undertake a People's Audit of top 20 politicians on the lists of the major political parties. This will look at their lifestyles, personal financial interests and track records on corruption. The audit will also outline their positions regarding fulfilling the rights to education, health, land, socio-economic justice, and labour rights;
- Conduct a People's Audit of election manifestos;
- Convene provincial meetings to discuss priorities and strategies to realise socio-economic rights, including health, basic education, sanitation, food, land and housing. These may culminate in the compilation of a charter embodying the principles for social justice, equality, environmental transformation, deepening democracy and dignity together with grass roots solutions to make democracy work for all ;
- Hold national and provincial marches to reclaim the spirit of 27 April 1994 and renew hope in social justice and state accountability.

Awethu! It is Ours!

For further information, or to subscribe to the Awethu! platform, please contact Diane Massawe on 082 341 5436 or email awethuplatform@gmail.com.

Community Renewables for the Solidarity Economy

Christiaan Bode



One of the main causes of climate change is the burning of materials like coal to produce our electricity. This is why to try and stop climate change it is crucial for all countries to move from producing their energy from burning coal, gas and oil to renewable energies. Renewable energy uses the energy from the sun, wind, and water to produce electricity, using wind turbines, solar panels and so on.

A further benefit of renewable energy for societies is that it is by its nature a form of decentralised power generation. That is, producing electricity from coal-fired and nuclear power stations requires fewer and very large power stations that each produce a huge amount of electricity which, in our country, are controlled by Eskom. South Africa's energy provision has also traditionally been prioritised towards providing the mining and industrial sector with cheap electricity, and neoliberal policies result in the poor lacking access to electricity and suffering cut offs. But the decentralised nature of renewable energy and the manageable size of renewable energy power generators means that there is significant opportunity for community ownership and involvement. There are localised and regional benefits that could be spread countrywide, bringing opportunities for local, bottom-up development and job creation to areas that are often marginalised.

South Africa is currently procuring some of the largest renewable energy power plants in the world.

This is being done through the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer (REIPP) procurement programme, which aims to bring onto the grid some 3725 MegaWatts of renewable power, equivalent to the size of some of South Africa's largest coal-fired power stations. The projects are selected through a competitive bidding programme, and so far, 37 private projects have been awarded Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) to sell power to Eskom over the following 20 years. Construction on some of these projects has already started.

The main problem with this procurement process is that it favours larger companies and transnational corporations who have the money to make the big investments. With our renewable energy sector being owned by transnational capital and overseas Independent Power Producers (IPPs) there is little room for direct empowerment on the ground, including skills transfer, manufacturing or community-led projects. There are also other challenges that would have to be overcome, such as the fact that many municipalities receive income from selling electricity to households, which they would lose if communities produced their own energy.

The price of renewable technologies is coming down and the price of coal-fired electricity is going up. It is therefore not only a moral imperative to be demanding more renewable power but also an economic one. With a vibrant cooperative sector in South Africa, community groups could start to explore the potential for community renewables projects. Whether on the top of a block of flats, an informal settlement without access to power, a rural off-grid community or a community that is tired of poor service delivery and rising electricity tariffs, community renewables offers a way to take the power back and create jobs in the process.

A socially-owned renewable energy sector usually refers to a mix of different forms of collective ownership. The mix includes energy parastatals, cooperatives, municipal-owned entities and other forms of community energy enterprises. Practical examples of such ownership would be worker owned factories that manufacture certain items for the sector or work-

er cooperatives providing energy sector support. The solidarity economy therefore can have an important role to play in developing socially-owned renewable energy in communities, grounding the production of energy, as with other goods and services, in its values and principles.

In places like Europe, the cooperative option has been popular in community owned renewables. In this model individual members buy a share in an energy cooperative which then supplies electricity to the member. These members are still be connected to the electricity distributor, paying a service fee for getting the electricity to their household. The cooperative bills the members monthly relative to their share in the plant.

These community renewables models overseas worked in a different socio-economic setting to that of South Africa, so the challenge for poor South Afri-

cans would be the upfront investment for a share in the cooperative, which raises the need for solidarity economy finance and other suitable financing mechanisms. Furthermore, grid connection and distribution barriers limit these models. What may work in the short term is a community's direct connection to the energy cooperative's power plant through a micro-grid. This would be ideal for informal settlements or rural villages without access to electricity. What is important is that there is no single solution to socially-owned renewable energy at the local level, but a whole range of arrangements can be worked out that suit each context.

Christiaan Bode is a renewable energy specialist in South Africa and an activist in the Democratic Left Front (DLF). He can be contacted at cbode@sidala.com.

International News

France Unveils Law to Support Cooperatives

In November 2012, France's Minister of Social and Solidarity Economy, Benoît Hamon, unveiled a new law to support co-operatives in the country on Global Worker Co-operative Day.

At a conference in Marseille, Mr Hamon presented the French government's draft law on Social and Solidarity Economy, which has an objective to sustain co-operative development and double the number of worker co-operatives in the next five years.

On 16 November 2012, the minister referred to co-ops as "an essential way to get France out of the crisis". He explained that the government was seeking to implement seven measures to facilitate the creation and the development of worker co-operatives.

One of them is establishing a "preferential right" for workers in the buyout of enterprises. The minister also spoke of providing training for bankruptcy courts to remove "reluctance" and "hostility" to look at the co-operative option to secure employment for workers.

The Minister also said the government supports worker co-operatives because they represent a "long-lasting model" that is "wise, universal ... innovative, and a model that associates ownership with entrepreneurial decisions".

Asked what he thought of Mr Hamon's new initiatives, Jean-Claude Dettelleux, Chairman of Credif Cooperatif, and ICA Board Director, said these are most welcome within the French co-operative movement. He said: "We need governments to adapt the law to the evolution of society. This is exactly what is happening now in France. The law [on social economy] has not changed much within the past ten years.

"The new government is committed to social economy. We have an excellent relationship with the new Minister for Social Economy. Mr Hamon has showed interest in the UN's International Year of Co-operatives, he was in Quebec, participating in the International Summit of Co-operatives and this is good for us. Now he knows more about co-ops."

Mr Dettelleux added the French government is planning to allocate a new fund for social economy worth €600 million.

The ICA's worker co-operative sectoral body, CICOPA, also offered to help in implementing this law. At the Global Worker Co-op Day event, the President of CICOPA, Manuel Mariscal, also said in his opening speech that worker co-operatives are "a solid answer to the concrete problems of the society, it is a model that brings hope in the current situation".

Paul Singer, Minister for Solidarity Economy in Brazil, was another keynote speaker at the event. He shared the main findings of a new law approved in Brazil that can be a way forward for other countries with the participants and thanked CICOPA for its support and advice in the legislative process.

Global Worker Co-operative Day, organised jointly by CICOPA and CG Scoop (The French Confederation of Worker Co-operatives), gathered 1,000 representatives from the Co-operative Movement, public authorities and academics. The conference featured speakers from Argentina, USA, India, Italy, Spain, France, Brazil and Canada, who shared their experiences.

Article Source: <http://ica.coop/en/media/news/france-unveils-law-support-co-operatives>

New Era Windows Cooperative Is Open for Business in Chicago!

In the second issue of the newsletter we reported on the struggle of the window-making factory workers to take over their bankrupted factory. Well, they have succeeded and have started production!

Meet the takers: They took over their factory, they took on their bosses, they took the initiative to form a worker cooperative and today they're taking the wraps off a brand-new worker-owned company: New Era Windows. It opened 9 May this year in Chicago, United States.

The workers in this story are members of the same workforce who, when they received word that their plant was about to be closed with no notice at what was then the Republic Windows and Doors factory in 2008, occupied their plant and became a cause celebre in a grim winter of mass layoffs. When they were laid off again in early 2012, by a second owner, they decided, as Apple would say, to "think different." With encouragement from their union, the United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers of America (UE), and The Working World, a progressive investment group that helps co-operative start-ups internationally, they formed a cooperative, "New Era Windows LLC." New Era is 100 percent owned by workers and now, at last, open for business.

"We decided to make a co-op because we were tired of our life being in someone else's hands," said window maker Melvin "Ricky" Macklin.

"When [Republic] closed we felt like it was the end of our lives...but we realized, we're not nobody," added co-worker/owner Armando Robles, president of the union local, UE 1110.

It hasn't been easy. Last year the New Era team had to fight for several months even to be allowed to bid on the factory. After that came contract negotiations and a move to a cheaper new location. To save on expensive moving costs, workers shifted the equipment from their old plant, themselves, in 80 tractor trailer loads.

"There have been times that we weren't sure that we were going to be able to get New Era off the

ground," recalled Macklin. "You need finance. Well, we didn't have a lot of people knocking on the door to give us money."

That's where The Working World stepped in.

"We have to remember, it still has a long way to go," says The Working World's Brendan Martin. But the only way the cooperative has been able to get launched in less than a year, he says, is because of the potential unleashed in the process of launching a cooperative. "If this were looked at by normal investment institutions, they'd have assumed it would cost \$2-5 million to open a business like this. It's been less than a million and the only reason for that is because that other \$2-3 million of value has been brought by the workers."

"Now more than ever they need support," says Martin. Among other clients, they're hoping that housing cooperatives and other cooperative businesses will choose to buy their windows from New Era in solidarity. "It's not just about financial support, but it is about customers," he says.

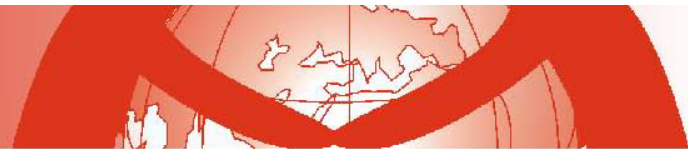
Becoming owners brings with it new responsibilities and work. The workers were asked if they were nervous:

"In opening up this plant we have learned we are so much more than what we thought we were," Macklin said. "In opening up this plant we've done our own electrical work, we've done the plumbing work. And all we thought was we were just window makers."

Article Source: <http://www.workerscontrol.net/authors/new-era-windows-cooperative-open-business-chicago>

To watch a short video about the cooperative, go to: <http://grittv.org/?video=new-era-windows-cooperative-is-open-for-business-in-chicago>

To find out more information on New Era Windows Cooperative, go to: www.newerawindows.com



The Food Sovereignty Campaign

Right to Food Dialogues for Building the Food Sovereignty Campaign Kick Off

Andrew Bennie

The first Right to Food Dialogue facilitated by COPAC as part of the food sovereignty campaign took place in Gauteng in November 2013. The Right to Food Dialogues are being conducted by COPAC, in partnership with the Foundation for Human Rights, in 3 provinces: Gauteng, Limpopo and North-west. Two other organisations are conducting the dialogues in the other 6 provinces, and these will result in a national conference on the Right to Food in October. These dialogues are crucial platforms on which to build the food sovereignty campaign and are aimed at bringing together different constituencies – community organisations, small farmers, trade unions, faith groups, NGOs and more – to have a dialogue on the issues faced by different constituencies on food, hunger and agriculture. The issues raised further help us to understand what people's experiences of the Right to Food are and therefore help us shape the food sovereignty campaign.

The Gauteng Right to Food Dialogue brought together over 60 people from a wide range of organisations. We had a very fruitful and intense day with enthusiastic participation and important issues raised. A key outcome of the dialogue included the nomination of a reference group to assist in organising the inter-provincial dialogue, as well as an agreement to continue the relationships that were established on the day through establishing a Food Sovereignty Forum in Gauteng. The forum will serve as a space for the different constituencies to continue to build relationships around the food issue, as a problem sharing and solving space, and for coordinating the building of the food sovereignty campaign.

The dialogues in Limpopo and North-west are being held on 11 and 28 February respectively. The Food Sovereignty Campaign is moving forward!

Ensuring a Voice for Small Farmers and Farmworkers in Fair Trade

Mandy Missouriis

In the early 2000's a South African environmental NGO – the Environmental Monitoring Group (EMG) – began working with a group of small-scale rooibos tea farmers near Niewoudville on the sustainable harvesting of their crop. At the time the small-scale rooibos farmers had to subsidise their income by working on large farms during harvesting season where they were not treated well by the farm owners. They were also being forced to accept very low prices for their tea.

During the sustainable harvesting work with EMG everyone realised that if the small-scale farmers were able to collectivise they would be able to produce enough volumes on their own to sell their tea independently as both organic and Fairtrade. With support from EMG the small-scale farmers set up the Heiveld Cooperative and got their Organic and Fairtrade Certification. In the process EMG organised exchange visits with other small-farmer groups like Wupperthal who also produced organic rooibos tea for the Fairtrade market and Eksteenskuil the first

group to produce Fairtrade raisins.

Fairtrade is an international market selling mainly in Europe and North America. It was started many years ago when church organisations and NGO's in the global north decided that the world needed a fairer global market to support small-farmers with decent prices for their produce in order to support development in the global South. It works by guaranteeing a minimum price (which is never lower and normally higher than the market price) for products and also by providing a 'premium' which is a percentage of sale over and above the minimum price which small-farmers can use to develop their cooperative businesses.

For example, premium money helped the Heiveld Cooperative build their own tea processing facility, install solar power and water tanks at the facility to make their business more environmentally sustainable and give them more control over the production of their product. Heiveld also have their own offices

and support their members by of buying their tea, providing organic rooibos seed and education and training. They are also able to provide jobs to members in season with good wages.

Whilst being able to sell to Fairtrade has helped the cooperative, it is also important to know that in order to be Fairtrade certified small farmer cooperatives need to be audited once a year to check that they are meeting Fairtrade standards and have to pay for the audit. They also have a separate audit for their organic certificate. Also important to note is that products like rooibos tea and raisins are not a fresh products making it much easier to export – it is a lot harder to export fresh produce which spoils easily. This is one of the reasons why there are only four Fairtrade certified cooperatives in South Africa.

In order to raise their voice in Fairtrade the Heiveld, Wupperthal and Eksteenskuil small farmers along with workers on Large farms started an organisation in 2005 called the Association for Fairness in Trade (AFIT). AFIT has been working with small-scale farmers and farm workers who sell to the Fairtrade market to build capacity amongst our members and to challenge the Fairtrade system when things are not working well. So the difference between the Fairtrade market and the normal market is not just the minimum price and Premium but also that small-farmers and workers, through their organisation in AFIT, are able to engage with the system to make it better.

Mandy Missouri is the Fair Trade Project Manager at the Environmental Monitoring Group (EMG). She can be contacted at mandy@emg.org.za.



Biowatch South Africa: Agro-Ecology for Food Sovereignty and the Fight For Justice

Rose Williams



As a country and as a world, we face multiple food, energy and climate change crises. Within this context, Biowatch South Africa challenges industrial agriculture and demonstrates ecologically sustainable alternatives to ensure biodiversity, food sovereignty and social justice.

Established in 1999, Biowatch works with small-holder farmers, other civil society organisations and government to ensure that people have control over their food, agricultural processes and resources, and other natural resources, within a bio-diverse, agro-ecological and sustainable system.

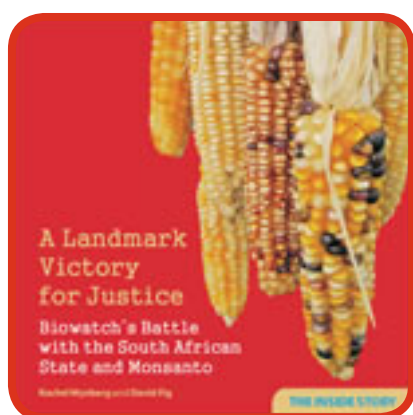
Our approach is two-fold:

- 1) We work simultaneously at policy level and directly with projects on the ground involving small-holder farmers. This means that any policy interventions are grounded in the experiences of rural people working the land, rather than in a think-tank vacuum.
- 2) Through the policy work, farmers become more aware of their context, of what needs changing in our society, of their collective power, and of the need to ensure the accountability of decision makers in a democracy. In this, Biowatch

serves to provide multiple linkages to all its stakeholders, and this approach serves to orient the organisation in a clear commitment to securing small-holder farmers' rights.

Our activities fall into three main focus areas:

- advocacy and research work;
- promoting agro-ecology; and
- international experience sharing.



A Landmark Victory for Justice

Biowatch gained wide public prominence in 2009 with its Constitutional Court victory. What's become known as "the landmark Biowatch Case", one of the most quoted cases in recent South African legal history, clarifies that in future, public interest litigants acting in good faith will not have to fear that costs will be awarded against them.

Biowatch recently launched its much-anticipated book *A Landmark Victory for Justice*. Biowatch's

Battle with the South African State and Monsanto. Written by Rachel Wynberg and David Fig, Biowatch founder trustees, the book tells the inside story of how a reasonable request for access to GMO permit applications catapulted the environmental watch-dog into almost a decade of litigation against the South African state and biotechnology multinational Monsanto.

Said David Fig, Biowatch Chairperson and co-author of the book: "The book is saying ... let's celebrate this victory together, let's understand more about what happened, let's learn the lessons, let's pass on the lessons not only to future generations but to other organisations that may be facing the same kinds of battles over information, over sustainable approaches to agriculture, over agro-ecology, land struggles, water struggles ... everyone can learn from what we went through."

Anyone campaigning for environmental or social justice needs to read this feel-good David and Goliath account of what courage and tenacity can achieve. The book serves as an inspiration to civil society and a warning to those pursuing narrow profit motives at the expense of the environment.

Rose Williams is the director of Biowatch South Africa. She can be contacted at 031 206 2954 and rose@biowatch.org.za.

A Landmark Victory for Justice is available in bookstores around the country. Books can be ordered directly from the Biowatch website www.biowatch.org.za, where an electronic version is also available for FREE download.

Surplus Peoples Project (SPP): Plant Breeders Rights Bills Threatens Seed Sovereignty

Zayaan Khan

The South African government has developed the Plant Breeders Rights Bill Draft that was tabled in parliament in 2013. The Surplus People Project (SPP) submitted critical comments on the Bill.

The Plant Breeder's Rights Bill (PBR) is designed to protect the integrity and economic interests of plant breeders by regulating the use of protected varieties. But it is important to recognise that it threatens the livelihoods of smallholder farmers who rely

on their farming for income and food security. This is because it directly tries to govern the culture of seed, how it is exchanged, traded and saved, a system that has been in place for thousands of years.

Plant breeding is mostly dominated by the horticultural industry (for ornamental plants and flowers) but it also includes a large portion of agricultural crops, as well as Genetically-Modified Organisms (GMOs). Basically, plant breeding has strict control and a new

variety has to conform to certain standards: it must be new (has not yet been commercialised); uniform (the plant characteristics remain consistent from plant to plant within that same variety); distinct (it differs from all other known varieties by one or more characteristics such as colour or height etc); and stable (the characteristics are genetically fixed from generation to generation and the genes do not revert).

The Bill prevents the sharing, exchanging and selling of any part of a protected variety of plant. However, farmers and gardeners alike are unable to tell the difference between patented seed or natural seed; holding the seed in one's hand it is impossible to tell the difference between the two. Seed simply needs to be suitable to their needs.

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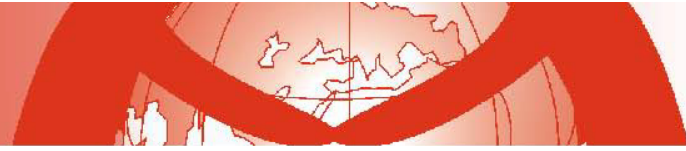
The Bill prevents the sharing, exchanging and selling of any part of a protected variety of plant. However, farmers and gardeners alike are unable to tell the difference between patented seed or natural seed; holding the seed in one's hand it is impossible to tell the difference between the two. Seed simply needs to be suitable to their needs.

Farmers have an established seed saving culture that is directly attached to heritage. Their system of seed has allowed for a certain level of independence and sovereignty within their food systems and livelihoods. Farmers freely harvest, exchange, share or sell seed that they have grown and bred for generations, much the same as smallholder farmers in the rest of Africa and around the world. Having little access to financial support or credit, they rarely buy seed.

One of the biggest reactions by farmers the SPP works with was the further isolation they felt from government. Firstly, in that they were not told about any of these laws to start with. Secondly, that they are now threatened with further restrictions in their seed culture. It is felt that the laws further support the understanding that this newer industrial method of agriculture is about making money and not about the wellbeing of the people or the environment as it severely limits the culture of seed saving, exchange and sharing and promotes the limitation of available agricultural crop varieties.

A further concern that has come out of the Bill is the issue of biopiracy and bioprospecting. That is, taking landraces that farmers have been raising for many generations and turning them into patented varieties, with no recognition to the farmers themselves.

This system of patenting has the adverse affect of supporting patenting within breeding which gives rise to genetically uniform varieties. This is necessary to conform to the industrial model of agriculture, but is a reality that does not serve the needs of the majority of people in our country. This system supports the rapid loss of genetic diversity and through intensive cross-breeding, supports what is called 'vegetative propagation'. This drastically weakens the gene pool, leading to lack of adaptability to environmental changes, major or minor, be it climate change, drought, pest infestation or air quality. The existing system of breeding and broader farming practices have been in existence for thousands of years and should not be restricted and displaced by policies that threaten these knowledge systems. While PBR laws apply to those industrial breeders, they should not apply to smallholder farmers.



Arts & Culture

Vukile Macingwana is a fieldworker in the Ntinga Ntaba Ka Ndoda Heritage and Development Organisation in Keiskammahoek, which is working with communities there around a local participatory development process, with the solidarity economy and food sovereignty as important components. He sent us the following poem, Human, which captures the humanist spirit of the solidarity economy. Read, be moved, and act! And please remember to feel free to send us your poetry, art, song and any other form of your creative expression that will inspire readers and activists as we build the solidarity economy and food sovereignty in South Africa.

Human
By Vukile Macingwana

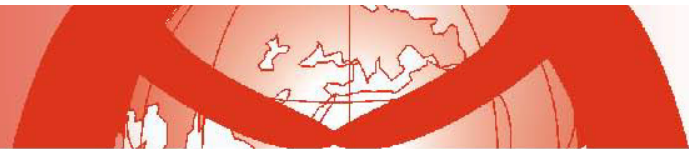
*I was not there when apartheid was still alive
But I have seen the graves and heard the tales
All around the world there are different flowers with different colours
Look at how they beautify the land together, it's so honest and peaceful*

*You black on white , you get Obama brilliant
You white on black , you get Bob Marley legendary
You white on white , you get Hitler no Princess Dianna
You black on black , you get Mugabe no Nelson Mandela
Beside the colour of your skin
Beside the language you are speaking
Is there any blood colour beside red?
Beside your race, religion and culture
We laugh and cry the same
We may not be one, but we are all human.*



Discussion, Notes and Research Page

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Discussion, Notes and Research Page

A large, faint background illustration of a person holding a globe, overlaid with horizontal lines for writing.

contact us

We invite organisations and activists to make contributions to the Newsletter through writing stories, contributing photographs or cultural contributions, such as poetry, art, songs etc.

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